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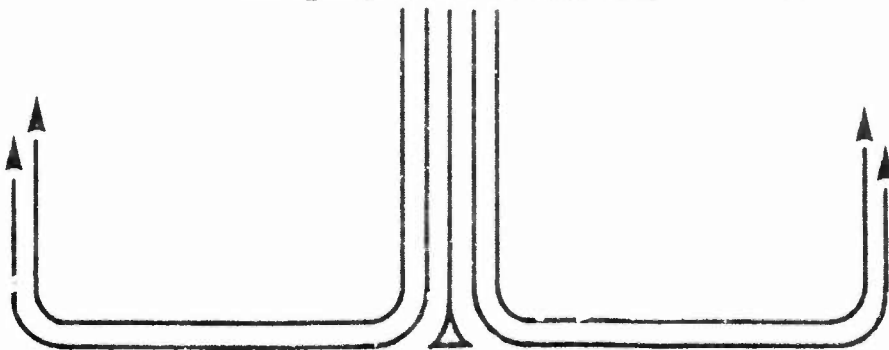
ANALYSIS OF THE MILITARY STRATEGIES  
AND WARFARE PRINCIPLES OF CHE GUEVARA  
AND FIDEL CASTRO DURING THE CUBAN  
REVOLUTION

MAJOR MONTE H. CALLEN, JR. 85-0360

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**TITLE** ANALYSIS OF THE MILITARY STRATEGIES AND WARFARE  
PRINCIPLES OF CHE GUEVARA AND FIDEL CASTRO DURING  
THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of  
requirements for graduation.

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## PREFACE

This research project is part of an ongoing program at Air Command and Staff College to study great warriors and great thinkers. My effort was directed toward enhancing our appreciation of how military strategy and the principles of war apply to guerrilla warfare. This study centered on Che Guevara and Fidel Castro and their military actions in the Cuban Revolution 1956-59.

Several people whose names would not otherwise appear in this document deserve recognition for significant contributions to those praiseworthy portions of this study. For those portions that are less than praiseworthy, I stand completely responsible.

First, I wish to thank Major John A. Baldwin for serving as my faculty advisor. His patient indulgence and continuous support provided me the freedom to study an area of my choosing. However, he was always available with professional guidance the many times that I strayed beyond my limits.

I also express special thanks to Marsha Clifton, my typist, whose labor somehow transformed chaos into order. Her many hours of deciphering and typing made the final presentation of this study possible.

Last, but certainly not least, I wish to thank my wife, Norma, for her significant role in this effort. Once again her love, understanding, and support were my most important source of inspiration.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The author has a varied military background. He was a T-38 Instructor Pilot, Check Pilot and Wing Flight Examiner in ATC. He served three years in the rated supplement as a research civil engineer and program manager with the Air Force Engineering and Services Center. Most recently, he was an Assistant Operations Officer and a WC-135B Air Refueling Instructor Pilot in the 55th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (MAC) at McClellan AFB, CA. The author has an M.S. in Facilities Management from the AFIT School of Systems and Logistics at Wright-Patterson AFB, OH. He coauthored a graduate thesis on computer modeling entitled, The Effect of Release Parameter Correlations on the Distribution of Computer Simulated Bomb Impacts.

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## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

If men could learn from history, what lessons it might teach us!  
But passion and party blind our eyes, and the light which  
experience gives us is a lantern on the stern, which shines only  
on the waves behind us!

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

History is one, if not the most important, of the sources of our military knowledge on armed conflict. It is the foundation of our heritage and an important cornerstone for our future. We study it to find trends in behavior, to reminisce over heroes, and to identify the reasons for battlefield victories and defeats. George Santayana, in his book The Life of Reason, published in 1906, summed up the importance of history by stating, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Today, we live in an age of scientific marvels and technology overload. Our military arsenal consists of a sophisticated array of F-15 aircraft, M-1 tanks, laser-guided munitions, Trident submarines, and nuclear powered aircraft carriers, to mention just a few. We depend on split-second timing and instant communications. Nevertheless, buried under all this technology is a delicate thread which ultimately determines success or failure as we face our adversaries. That thread is military strategy coupled with the basic principles of war.

Armed conflict today runs the gamut from isolated terrorist incidents to the ultimate threat of global nuclear war. Along this continuum, actually not too far from isolated terrorist incidents, is guerrilla warfare. As with all armed conflicts, success in the guerrilla environment is heavily dependent on leadership; however, the question arises, "Does success in the guerrilla environment depend on proper application of basic military strategy and the principles of war?"

This research project will explore the importance of military strategy and the principles of war in guerrilla warfare. Military strategy will be defined in concert with the Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) strategy process model and the principles of war will be taken from Air Force Manual (AFM) 1-1, Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force. The guerrilla war used will be the Cuban Revolution 1956-59. This study will begin with an examination of the principle guerrilla combatants, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, and their participation in the Cuban Revolution. Then, using this information as a foundation, we will explore their uses of military strategy and the principles of war during the Cuban Revolution and conclude with a discussion of whether these two factors were important to their success. Specifically, this study will answer the research question, "Did Guevara and Castro use military strategy, as stated in the ACSC strategy process model, and the principles of war, as stated in AFM 1-1, during the Cuban Revolution 1956-59?"

## Chapter Two

### GUEVARA, CASTRO, AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION 1956-59

Guerrilla warfare resembles a boxing match in which there is no knockout for round after round, but one of the fighters is winning on points and a time comes when the K.O. can be delivered.

Herbert L. Matthews

Guerrilla warfare is a strange mixture of chaos, combatants, and confusion. At first glance it has no form, apparently devoid of all the structure and big battles we've come to associate with great wars such as World Wars I and II. The Cuban Revolution was no exception to this mindset.

To fully understand what happened militarily in Cuba during 1956 thru 1959, it is necessary to first look at the combatants. How did Che Guevara, a militant Argentine doctor, end up joining the guerrilla forces of a self-imposed Cuban exile named Fidel Castro? What training prepared them for combat? More importantly, how did 82 guerrilla fighters defeat the 40,000-man Cuban Army--in just over two years? These and other questions will be answered in this chapter.

#### BIOGRAPHY OF CHE GUEVARA

Revolutionaries are not born, they are made. Moreover, they do not spread revolution everywhere they go like the carriers of some infectious disease. Revolutionaries are molded by circumstances, societal conditions, and psychological factors. (9:18)

Ernesto Guevara de la Serna was born on June 14, 1928 in Rosario, Argentina, to upper middle-class parents. (9:18) His father was a contractor and his mother was intelligent, warm, and devoted to Ernesto, her first-born. Soon after Ernesto's birth, his family moved to San Isidro and he contracted asthma. No cure could be found and so after two years Ernesto's family moved to a drier climate in Alta Gracia, Argentina.

Ernesto grew up in Alta Gracia where the dry climate was good for his health, although he still suffered periodic severe asthma attacks. He liked hiking and games of physical endurance and "was willing to do almost anything--perhaps to prove to himself and others that in spite of his chronic illness he was just as good as they." (9:18)

Ernesto's childhood was characterized by a loving mother, parents who encouraged free thinking, and no religion. At 14 he went on a two-month hiking trip to surrounding provinces. He played goalkeeper in soccer and half-scrum in rugby--both key positions where he developed as a leader. He learned the game of chess at age 11 and became an expert in only two years.

Ernesto grew up in a politicized environment. His father was moderate, his mother was a leftist, both were anti-Nazi and "militarily opposed Juan Peron's candidacy for the presidency of Argentina in 1946. After Peron came to power, they joined the underground resistance movement against his regime." (9:20)

In 1946, at 18, Ernesto enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Buenos Aires. (9:20) However, he still preferred traveling to studying. In 1950, he toured all of northern and central Argentina on motorbike. In 1952, Ernesto and a friend, Alberto Grandos, set out to explore all of Latin America. They visited Chile, the Peruvian Frontier, worked in a leprosarium on the Amazon River at San Pablo, Peru, and ran afoul of dictator Laureano Gomez' corrupt authorities in Columbia. (9:21-22) Finally, Ernesto and Alberto separated in Caracas, Venezuela. Ernesto then went to Miami where he was later deported back to Argentina by the US Department of Immigration.

Back in Argentina, Ernesto went on a crash program to finish his medical degree. He graduated in 1953 and decided to return to Venezuela and rejoin his friend Alberto. Enroute he stopped at La Paz, Bolivia. Bolivia had just undergone a popular revolution where foreign-owned mines had been nationalized, peasants had taken possession of feudal estates, and overall there was "an atmosphere of revolutionary fervor and excitement." (9:23) However, when Ernesto saw peasants being systematically sprayed with DDT by the Ministry of Peasant Affairs, he was incensed because "the government was spraying them to rid them of lice, rather than trying to improve the social and economic conditions which were the cause of their lice." (9:23-24) Ernesto believed the new regime was merely reformist and not revolutionary. In September, 1953, he left Bolivia and visited Peru, Ecuador, Panama, and Costa Rica before reaching his destination, Guatemala, in January, 1954.

Ernesto settled in a pension with militant Peruvian exiles on the outskirts of Guatemala City. There he met his future wife, Hilda Gadea. Ernesto sought work as a doctor, but was refused by the Minister of Health because he didn't have a Guatemalan Communist Party membership card. (9:25) Ernesto was furious and told the minister when he decided to affiliate himself with a political party "it would be out of conviction and not out of necessity." (9:25) However, it was about this time that he began to read the works of Marx and Lenin and took an interest in politics while he was working in several agrarian reform programs.

Still, an even more significant event in Ernesto's revolutionary development was just on the horizon. On June 17, 1954, Carlos Castillo Armas led his mercenary invasion forces out of Honduras and El Salvador into Guatemala toward Guatemala City. "The invasion was supported by the CIA, who supplied the invaders with arms and planes and also arranged for the betrayal of the higher echelons of the Guatemalan army." (9:26) Ernesto watched in alarm as President Jacobo Arbenz "naively relied upon his army to repulse the attack and refused to give arms to the various left-wing parties and organizations that were demanding them so that they could help defend 'their revolution.'" (9:28) One month later he left Guatemala for Mexico.

In Mexico City, Ernesto was reunited with Hilda and a variety of revolutionaries from throughout Latin America--Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Cuba, Columbia, Venezuela, Haiti, and Argentina. He married Hilda and their first child was born in February, 1955. During this time he

worked as a street photographer, brooded over his Guatemalan experiences and nurtured his hatred for the United States. (9:28) In mid-1955, Ernesto met Fidel Castro. He took an immediate liking to Fidel and embraced Castro's plan to return to Cuba with a well-trained, small army and fight Fulgencio Batista and the Yanquis. (9:28) Ernesto signed on as a doctor and along with 80 other personnel underwent extensive guerrilla warfare training with Colonel Alberto Bayo. It was during this training that Ernesto's comrades gave him the nickname Che "because like most Argentines he used the word che (similar to 'Hey Man') in almost every sentence." (9:29) Che "accepted the nickname with pride because it marked him as an Argentine." (9:29)

In November 1956, Che, Fidel, and 80 guerrilla fighters departed Mexico for Cuba aboard the Granma. The Cuban Revolution was about to begin.

#### BIOGRAPHY OF FIDEL CASTRO

For my part, if for my life I have to cede an iota of my right or my honor, I prefer to lose it a thousand times: "A just principle from the depth of a cave can do more than an army."

Fidel Castro

Fidel Castro was born August 13, 1926 in Biran, Cuba, a district of the municipality of Mayari on the north coast of the province of Oriente. (11:17) He was the illegitimate son of Angel Castro y Argiz, a shrewd and thrifty immigrant laborer who worked hard to acquire a sugar plantation measuring 23,300 acres. After Angel's first wife died, he married Fidel's mother, Lina Ruz Gonzales, his former house servant, and they eventually had

five children: Angela, Ramon, Fidel, Raul, and Juana. Fidel was baptized a Roman Catholic. His mother was very affectionate but at an early age he developed a bad relationship with his father, a conservative landowner. For example, at age six, Fidel decided he wanted to go to school. Angel, thinking this was foolish for a plantation owner, said no. However, when Fidel threatened to burn the house down, Angel consented. (11:21) Fidel's primary education was through parochial and Jesuit schools.

In 1942, at age 16, Fidel's parents sent him to Havana to attend Colegio Belen, a Jesuit high school. An outstanding student and athlete, he played basketball, baseball, ran track, and in 1944 was voted "the best school athlete." (11:21) Fidel graduated in the upper third of his class and received the following entry in the 1945 Colegio Belen Year Book:

1942-1945 Fidel distinguished himself always in all the subjects related to letters. His record was one of excellence, he was a true athlete, always defending with bravery and pride the flag of the school. he has known how to win the admiration and the affection of all. He will make law his career and we do not doubt that he will fill with brilliant pages the book of his life. He has good timber and the actor in him will not be lacking. (5:15)

In 1945, Fidel entered the University of Havana Law School (Faculty of Law). University life was characterized by absent professors, which resulted in most courses being taught by inept assistants. Student gangs ran black markets in textbooks and terrorized other students and professors. (11:24) Fidel was very active in student affairs and picked up his "black legend" from two incidents. First, he was accused by later enemies of killing two students. Fidel admitted carrying a gun, but as Herbert



Matthews, in his 1969 biography, Fidel Castro (page 25) states, "There is not the slightest shred of evidence that Fidel took part in any killings at the university...It is a case of guilt by association and of wishful thinking." The second incident was Fidel's participation in the Bogotazo, riots in Bogota Columbia, which occurred during the Ninth Conference of American States on April 9, 1948.

Surrounded by diverse elements who wanted to disrupt the conference, particularly the Communists, Fidel ostensibly was in Bogota to attend an anti-colonialism and anti-imperialist student congress. However, when Jorge Elecier Gaitan, a popular leader of the Columbian Liberal Party, was slain, a riot erupted and angry mobs headed for the presidential palace. Fidel's participation progressed from trying to stop looters, to unsuccessfully inciting pro-Liberal Party policemen into action, to firing sporadic shots from a hillside flanking the city. The riots lasted one night and for his part Fidel was branded a Communist, blamed for the uprising, and sent home to Cuba. Perhaps Castro's university days are best summarized in the following quote: "...Fidel was a rebellious, rambunctious troublemaker, always looking for and sometimes making mischief--in short, a wild young man." (11:26)

While a student at the University of Havana, Fidel fell in love with Mirta Diaz-Balart. Over the objections of the Diaz-Balart family, they were married on October 12, 1948, and honeymooned in Miami, Florida. Their son, Fidelito, was born on September 1, 1949.

Following his graduation in 1950, Fidel joined the law firm of Azpiazu Castro y Rezende. He devoted most of his practice to poor people, handling most cases for no fee. (5:25) As in college, he was very active politically and became a devoted follower of Cuban Reformist Eduardo Chibas. Fidel was excited by Chibas' nationalism, his "left-of-center" ideology, and his campaign to end governmental graft and corruption. (5:25) However, on March 10, 1952, Fulgencio Batista returned to Cuba from exile in the United States, and in a bloodless coup took over the armed forces and the government.

"Seethed with anger and shame," Fidel wrote a letter to Batista in which he prophesied Batista's eventual overthrow. At the same time, he filed a brief before the Court of Constitutional Guarantees in Havana requesting the assumption of power by Batista be declared unconstitutional. (5:27) Fidel also submitted a slightly varied brief to the Urgency Court in Havana advocating prison terms totaling 100 years for Batista for violating six articles of the Code of Social Defense. (5:27) The Court of Constitutional Guarantees ruled that Batista's revolution was the source of law and therefore could not, by definition, be unconstitutional. The Urgency Court ignored Fidel's brief completely. Fidel, thinking revolution was the only route remaining, organized a revolutionary group and "planned a military operation that would not only electrify the people of Cuba, but might have an excellent chance of successfully sparking a nation-wide revolt against Batista." (5:30)

On July 26, 1953, Fidel and 170 guerrillas attacked Moncada Barracks, the principle fortress of the province of Oriente in Santiago de Cuba. Historically, this attack became known as the 26th of July Movement. Fidel's plan was to storm the barracks and arrest all the high ranking officers, thereby winning a quick victory without firing a shot. Having secured the barracks, he then planned to win popular support for his revolt by playing radio broadcasts of the dead leader, Eduardo Chibas. Fidel failed because it was "a mad, hopeless, suicidal adventure." (11:64) Batista immediately suspended civil rights, banned print of almost everything, and ordered that Fidel not be taken alive. Through sheer luck, in the form of Lieutenant Pedro Sarria, Castro was not killed. When his patrol found Fidel hiding in the foothills of the Sierra Maestra Mountains, Lt. Sarria kept Castro's identity a secret and took him safely into custody. (11:64)

The trial for the Moncada attackers convened on September 21, 1953. The court was composed of three judges. Strict censorship was imposed and the court as well as all access routes were heavily guarded. Fidel was charged as material author and leader of the insurrection and served as his own defense council. In his closing argument, Fidel stated:

I end my defense, but I will not do it as the lawyers always do, asking for the liberty of the defendant; I cannot ask that when my companions are already suffering ignominious imprisonment on the Isle of Pines. Send me to join them to share their fate. It is inconceivable that honest men are dead or jailed in a Republic where the President is not a criminal and a thief. (5:82)

2

Fidel was convicted and sentenced to 15 years in the penitentiary on the Isle of Pines.

At the time, the Isle of Pines was one of Cuba's most modern prisons. While incarcerated Fidel maintained esprit de corps with his Moncada comrades and organized a school in which he taught history and philosophy. He also served some time in isolation. When censorship on the trial proceedings was finally lifted, Fidel's popularity began to increase dramatically until he became something of a popular hero. (5:84) Finally, on May 2, 1955, Batista granted amnesty to the Moncada attackers. Upon his release Fidel said this of Lieutenant Roger Perez Dias, one of his guards:

I want you, Lieutenant, and all the members of the Army to know that we are not enemies of the armed forces but only adversaries. Because of the circumstances that exist in the country we were guided when we went to Moncada only by the objective to fight against the regime. (5:93)

Large crowds met Fidel and carried him on their shoulders. Despite being banned from the airways and harassed by Batista's hirelings, Fidel resumed his political activity and called for immediate general elections. Finally, in July, 1955, he left Cuba for Mexico to activate plans "to invade Cuba from Mexico and arouse the youth of the country to take up arms to oust the dictator. He never doubted that he would succeed." (5:96)

In Mexico, Fidel, his brother Raul, members of the 26th of July Movement, other Cuban exiles, and later Che Guevara trained under sixty-five-year-old Colonel Alberto Bayo, an anti-communist, anti-Franco

freedom fighter living in self-imposed exile. (5:98) At the time, Bayo, a Cuban, was an instructor at the School of Military Aviation in Mexico. Funded by Cuban refugees living in America as well as loyal supporters in Cuba, Fidel and his companions trained vigorously in guerrilla tactics and strategy. (2:81-82) During this time they were harassed by various Mexican authorities (encouraged by Batista) who raided their homes and confiscated weapons. On March 19, 1956, Castro divorced his 26th of July Movement from all political parties in Cuba and formed an independent revolutionary organization. For the trip over to Cuba, Fidel bought the Granma, a 58-foot yacht, through a Mexican friend named Antonio del Conde. Under ever-increasing harassment from the Mexican authorities, on November 15, 1956, Fidel boldly announced his proposed invasion. On November 25, "Castro's expedition sailed down the Rio Tuxpan [River] into the Gulf of Mexico and headed eastward for Oriente Province and his war against Batista." (5:138)

#### HISTORY OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION (1956-59)

To make a revolution, you have more need of a given amount of stupidity on one side than a given dose of light on the other.

Antonine de Rivarol

#### The Landing

Right from the beginning things did not go well for Castro, Guevara, and their guerrilla fighters. The over-loaded Granma, only marginally seaworthy at best and pounded by heavy seas and rain, was only able to make around seven knots on the trip from Mexico to Cuba. Guevara suffered from

an acute attack of asthma and most of the other Fidelistas were chronically seasick as the planned five-day crossing dragged on into the seventh day. Castro had intended to land at Niquero in western Oriente Province on November 30, 1956, in order to coincide with a revolt led by Frank Pais, a Castro supporter, in Santiago de Cuba. (2:88) Instead, on December 2, 1956, the Granma literally shipwrecked on Playa de las Coloradas beach in the Belic District, south of Niquero. (2:86) As a result, Castro missed the 50 men, jeeps, trucks, food, and weapons waiting for him at Niquero. Instead, he was met by a Cuban warship, about 1000 army soldiers, and several air force spotter planes. On the Granma the Fidelistas had a respectable cache of weapons: two anti-tank guns, 35 rifles with telescopic sights, 55 Mendoza rifles, three Thompson light machine guns, and 40 light hand machine gun pistols. (17:894) However, in their flight from dictator Fulgencio Batista's welcoming party, the Fidelistas lost all but a few weapons and some ammunition. They marched for three days without food and water.

On December 5, 1956, the exhausted Fidelistas stopped to rest in a sugarcane field at Alegria de Pio. (2:90) Laying in the open, without any sentries posted, they ignored the air force piper planes circling overhead. Surrounded and subsequently attacked by the army, the Fidelistas were soundly defeated in a brush fight that lasted less than two hours. Twenty-four guerrillas were killed and the rest fled into the countryside in various groups of 3-13 men. (2:90) On December 17, 1956, Fidel and some of the other survivors reached a safe haven at the farm of Ramon Perez.

Ramon's brother, Crescencio Perez, an unofficial peasant leader in the historically rebellious Sierra Maestra region who was "a bandit more than a radical," (17:901) helped locate scattered members of Castro's band. He also helped gain loyalty and support for the Fidelistas among the local peasants. During this time, Castro and his guerrillas were model visitors, paying for their food and supplies to the point that sometimes "it was necessary to pay double the value of everything they bought." (17:904) Of Castro's invading force of 82 guerrilla fighters, 21 had been killed, 30 captured, and the 30 that remained had only seven weapons. (2:90) Nevertheless, on December 24, 1956, Castro said, "The regrouping of the Granma expeditionaries is a definitive sign that the days of Batista are numbered. From now on the army of the 26th of July Movement [M-26-7] will not be defeated." (2:91) With that the Fidelistas headed high up into the Sierra Maestra Mountains to regroup, get acquainted with the surrounding territory, and, above all, to avoid contact with the army.

### Sierra Maestra

The Sierra Maestra mountain range is by far the wildest part of Cuba and has the highest mountains, including Pico Turquino, the Blue Mountain, which rises 8,600 feet. Most of the mountains are wooded, but vegetation ranges from coarse cactus on the lower and drier slopes to beautiful rain forests of trees and ferns in the higher elevations. The range itself is 100 miles long and 20-30 miles wide at the broadest point. It is bounded by the sea to the south, the coastal plain of Niquero-Campechuela-Manzanillo to

the west, and the Cuban central highway to the north and east. The mountains continue east eventually becoming Sierra del Cobre, the Copper Mountains, before falling away to Santiago de Cuba and its bay. (See Fig. 1) Population-wise it is a poor area, an excellent haven for a small band of guerrilla fighters. In contrast to the natural tranquility of the Sierra Maestra, Batista's reign of public terror continued when, on January 15, 1957, he suspended civil rights in the country. On January 17, 1957, the Fidelistas attacked an isolated army outpost at La Plata.

The battle at La Plata only lasted one hour, but was a classical guerrilla assault. Castro, posing as an army colonel, gathered data on the soldiers in the outpost from Chicho Osorio, a drunk mayoral of El Macho estate. (17:913) He divided his forces (22 guerrillas) into four groups and attacked in the dark, firing volleys from several sides, and setting several houses on fire. When the battle ended, of the 15 soldiers in the outpost, two had been killed, five wounded, three taken prisoner, and the rest had fled. (2:92) For their part, the Fidelistas captured 12 rifles, one submachine gun, 1000 rounds of ammunition, plus some food, medicine, and clothes. (2:92) This marked the first military victory for the guerrillas and boosted their morale tremendously. However, much more significant was the fact that when the army press and radio office disclosed the attack, the Cuban people learned that the Rebel Army still existed.

After the victory at La Plata, Castro led his Fidelistas north toward a small stream known as Arroyo del Infierno. Anticipating pursuit by the





army, he prepared an ambush which was almost spoiled by Che Guevara who, wearing a Batistiano uniform from La Plata, was fired upon by another of the Fidelistas. (17:914) Castro set up his ambush around two bohios (huts) in the center of a glade. In the ensuing ambush on an army patrol led by Lieutenant Sanchez Mosquera, three soldiers were killed, one each by Castro and Guevara, and one rifle and a cartridge belt were captured. Both sides withdrew, but the guerrillas had learned another important lesson; attack vanguards of patrols for "without a vanguard there can be no army." (2:914)

Despite the victory at La Plata and the successful ambush at Arroyo del Infierno, things were not going well for the barbudos (bearded ones, as Castro's rebels were known in the region). On two separate occasions they narrowly avoided liquidation, once by an air attack near Caracas, and a second time by an army ambush at Altos de Espinosa. (6:25, 29) Che Guevara in his book Episodes of the Revolutionary War, pages 25-26, described the situation as follows:

also announced that the crimes of insubordination, desertion and defeatism were to be punished by death.

The situation was not a happy one. Our column lacked cohesion. It had neither the ideological awareness nor the esprit de corps that can be attained only through hard, bitter struggle. Day after day, more comrades would ask to be released and to be assigned to missions in the cities--although this involved even greater danger--but it was evident that they simply could not stand the rough going.

Castro, himself, narrowly escaped death when a would-be assassin, Eutimio Guerra, lost his nerve. However, it was also during this critical phase

that Castro requested, through his followers in Havana, an interview with a foreign press correspondent.

On February 17, 1957, Fidel Castro was interviewed in the Sierra Maestra by Herbert L. Matthews, a news correspondent for The New York Times. While being led to the interview sight, Mr. Matthews observed that the Fidelistas used a unique "code system of commands given by soft whistles and bird chirping by which a commander could lead a group through the jungle without speaking a word." (12:83) He was told later that the Fidelistas had learned the code from Colonel Bayo in Mexico. For Castro, Mr. Matthews' interview and more importantly his photographs, served three purposes. (2:93) First, it crushed Batista's censorship and his credibility. Second, it gave Castro global attention and, much to his displeasure, made him a North American legend. Third, and most importantly, it marked Castro and his Fidelistas as the center and symbol of the revolution. Another event just on the horizon would help solidify this position.

On March 13, 1957, the Directorio Revolucionario (DR), a rival group to Fidel's M-26-7 guerrillas attempted to overthrow Batista by storming the presidential palace in Havana. They ultimately failed, but Batista, despite a subsequent wave of support and sympathy from the "best in Cuban public and commercial life," (17:931) answered with horror and brutal repressions. The only safe haven was deep in the Sierra Maestra with the Fidelistas. Thus, the M-26-7 began to grow in prestige, ultimately attracting new recruits.

On March 16, 1957, the first group of reinforcements, 50 men from Santiago under Jorge Sotus, came to the Sierra Maestra. However, all was not rosy for the Fidelistas and by May 23, 1957, Castro remarked "our struggle against lack of moral, ideological and physical preparation of combatants was daily." (17:938) In fact, he disbanded a whole squadron and reduced his total force from 150 to 127 men, of which only 80 were well armed. (17:938) Clearly some action was necessary, as expressed in the following conversation between Castro and Guevara in late May 1957:

[Fidel] Che, we have to make our presence felt immediately, hit the enemy hard, so hard that they can't keep telling the people of Cuba that we don't exist in the Sierra, especially now when the tyranny is denying the fact that we had an interview with Matthews.

[Che] I agree with you, Fidel, but we have to make sure of a successful attack, capturing arms from the enemy and producing many casualties so that it will be hard for them to hide the truth. (12:92)

The target they chose was the army garrison on the sea coast at El Uvero in Oriente Province.

At daybreak on May 28, 1957, the Fidelistas attacked the 53-man army garrison at El Uvero, commanded by Lieutenant Carrera. Bordered by the sea on one side, the Fidelistas took up positions on the other three. In the ensuing battle, 15 guerrillas were killed while the army suffered 14 killed, 19 wounded, 14 captured, and 6 escapees. (7:939-940) During the battle, Che Guevara, who was still just a doctor, noticed one flank had no cover. He immediately took several men and a machine gun and attacked. After the

battle he was promoted to Comandante (Major), the first guerrilla to achieve such rank after Castro. (12:93) This battle was the first significant Fidelista victory and therefore greatly improved morale. Batista took immediate action.

Politically, Batista took drastic measures. He had 2000 families evacuated from Oriente and placed in concentration camps. (2:97) However, under nationwide condemnation, which threatened his drive for popular support, he was forced to rescind this action. Militarily, he shifted the army in Oriente to a policy of guerrilla containment because, for all practical purposes, the Fidelistas controlled Oriente. As Che said, the victory at El Uvero had "greater psychological impact than any other in the history of the war" (12:92) because "the fate of every garrison located far from major troop concentrations" (2:97) was sealed. Militarily, for the Fidelistas, the tide was turning, but not so politically.

#### Llano versus Sierra

Within Castro's M-26-7 group in Cuba there were actually two factions, llano (urban) and sierra. Both factions shared the same goal, the overthrow and ouster of Batista, but they differed significantly on their strategy for success.

The llano or urban underground was centered in the cities, most notably, Havana and Santiago. Frank Pias, who headed the llano in Santiago and led the unsuccessful revolt in coordination with the Granma landing, now

wanted a "new tactic, a new line." (2:98) Specifically, he wanted to reduce the number of leaders in M-26-7, centralize coordination and decision making, and define everyone's function; in short, "to act a little in a dictatorial fashion." (2:98) Pias felt emphasis should be on a revolutionary general strike that would drive Batista from power. In addition, he advocated a thirteen-member national directorate for M-26-7 with Castro's guerrillas getting only one delegate.

The sierra faction of M-26-7, led by Castro, believed llano should support the Rebel Army and be complementary. Fidel firmly believed that guerrilla warfare was the key to ousting Batista; furthermore, he believed the guerrillas were the vanguard of M-26-7 and as such must retain both political and military leadership. He argued that security was better in the mountains because the urban centers were Batista's power and the key to defeating this power was to attack it on the perimeter, namely, the Sierra Maestra. (2:98)

To bolster his power base and undercut the llano, Fidel aligned himself with what was considered the "old generation" in Cuba. (2:99) Through negotiations with Raul Chibas, brother of the founder of the Ortodoxo Party and leader of the ortodoxos, and Felipe Pazos, First President of the National Bank of Cuba, Castro drew up the "Sierra Maestra Manifesto." (2:99) Although moderate in character, this alliance was nationalistic in context and placed special emphasis on a broad civic front to combat Batista. More importantly though, it gave Castro and his Fidelistas

"respectability, stature, and opened the door to accommodation with old political leaders and professional groups." (2:99) However, on July 30, 1957, Frank Pias was captured and killed in Santiago de Cuba. With Pias' death the llano center shifted from Santiago to Havana and Castro emerged as the dominant leader of M-26-7. The llano-sierra conflict would remain for the duration of the revolution but never again as a schism that threatened the movement.

As part of a routine province visit, United States Ambassador Earl E.T. Smith came to Oriente during Frank Pias' funeral, where he witnessed a brutal police beating of 200 demonstrating women. (2:99) Once again Batista had stirred the fires of public outrage and tainted his image before the American government. Smith stated publicly, "Any sort of excessive police action is abhorrent to me." (1:55) However, it wasn't long before Batista had problems from a different side.

#### Revolt at Cienfuegos

On September 5, 1957, Naval Lieutenant Dionisio San Roman led a military revolt at the Southern Naval District at Cienfuegos on the southern coast of Las Villas Province. (2:102) Planned as part of a national uprising at barracks in Havana, Cienfuegos, Mariel, and Santiago de Cuba which was called off at the last minute, the isolated rebellion at Cienfuegos was crushed by Batista. The police and military intelligence went on a campaign of torture and murder of suspected revolutionaries, including aerial bombing of the city of Cienfuegos. Subsequently, in

Cienfuegos, government troops buried 200 wounded alive! (12:94) Once again Batista's regime was weakened. Many career officers in the military resented his brutality and some became close collaborators with the revolutionaries. A few weeks after the uprising, USAF Major General Truman Landon flew to Havana and presented the medal of the Legion of Merit to Colonel Carlos Tabernilla, who had directed the indiscriminate aerial bombing of Cienfuegos. (12:94)

### The Second Year

By December 1957, one year after the Granma landing, the Fidelistas were a credible guerrilla army who controlled 2000 square miles within the Sierra Maestra. (17:974) It was also during this period that the nomadic life ended for the Fidelistas. Relatively safe in the Sierra Maestra, they settled into a semipermanent camp, "the rebel forces had, for all intents and purposes, converted themselves into something approaching a regular army, bivouacking in friendly territory." (15:25) Basic training was conducted for recruits and the guerrillas even did some small-scale manufacturing of explosives, boots, and uniforms. They also started a field hospital, established outposts connected by telephones, and started a small newspaper, El Cubano Libre. (8:205) On February 24, 1958, from his headquarters in La Plata, Castro began broadcasting from a small transmitter on what would eventually grow into Radio Rebelde (Rebel Radio). (2:105) From this base, the guerrillas began to expand their activities.

On March 10, 1958, Raul Castro took a column of 82 men and moved into the seven municipalities northeast of Fidel's group in the Sierra Maestra;



while at the same time, Juan Almeida took a second column of 70 men and established a base at El Cobre, west of Santiago de Cuba. (2:105) Thus, Raul, Fidel, and Almeida formed a triangle of guerrilla operations in the region.

On March 14, 1958, the United States Department of State suspended arms shipments to Batista. The US claimed that he had used grant-in-aid equipment marked for hemispheric defense for internal security. The effects of this suspension were devastating. Batista not only lost the arms but US sanction of his policies. Thus, he was essentially isolated with only his very close associates and his police and paramilitary groups. With things going so badly for Batista, the llano faction thought perhaps the time was right for another national strike.

Faustino Perez, the llano leader in Havana, conferred with Castro in the Sierra Maestra and the two of them agreed that a general revolutionary strike in conjunction with stepped-up rebel military action might drive Batista out. (2:106) The strike was initiated on April 9, 1958, but failed miserably because of poor communications, short-notice activation, and an overall lack of support from all the M-26-7 urban groups.

For the Fidelistas, the failed strike produced three significant results. First, it showed that Batista's real power was in the urban police not the armed forces. Secondly, it obliterated and discredited the llano leadership, cadre, and resources. Lastly, it enabled Castro to consolidate

once and for all his political and military leadership of the Cuban revolutionary movement.

#### Opercion Verano

On the heels of his April 9, 1958 crushing defeat of the llano revolt, Batista decided it was time to also rid himself of the rebels in the mountains. On May 24, 1958, he initiated Opercion Verano and sent 10,000 soldiers (14 battalions and 7 companies) with air and naval support to Oriente Province. (2:109; 17:996) Under the command of General Eulogio Cantillo, the army moved down from the north and northeast. Along the way they were ambushed and harassed with land mines by a small guerrilla commando force under Camilo Cienfuegos. Castro positioned his column west of Turquino Peak along a 15-mile front and covered all natural entrances to the Sierra Maestra. On June 15, 1958, the army closed in and pushed Castro's column back into the rugged regions of the Sierra Maestra, (2:109) forcing him to fight "within a much more tightly drawn perimeter." (16:263)

On June 14, 1958, Raul and the Second Front in the Sierra Cristal Mountains signed a nonaggression pact with Major Pino Aquila, who commanded an army battalion of approximately 1000 men. (2:109) In late June, he kidnapped 45 Americans and 3 Canadians consisting of 12 technicians from the Moa Bay Mining Company, 2 officials from the United States-owned Nicaro Nickel Plant, 3 officials of the United Fruit Company, 2 sugar mill managers, and 28 United States marines and sailors. (14:355) Raul demanded that the US stop all shipments of military equipment to Cuba, stop allowing

Cuban aircraft to refuel at Guantanamo Naval Base, and force Batista to promise not to use US weapons against Castro. Washington, while struggling with whether to answer these demands with concessions or military force, nevertheless pressured Batista to save the hostages and discontinue bombing on the Second Front. Faul eventually released the hostages without any concessions from the US save the international prestige from negotiating with American Consul Grant Wollam stationed in Santiago de Cuba. (16:259) More importantly though, during the three-week cease fire, Raul "had been busy preparing new ambushes" (16:260) for the army's offensive after the hostages were released. No offensive came. Meanwhile, back in the Sierra Maestra, Castro was on the verge of two significant victories.

On June 29, 1958, Colonel Sanchez Mosquera, with 1000 men under his command, was resting in a valley at Santo Domingo. (17:997) Castro surrounded him with 300 Fidelistas and in three days of sporadic fighting decimated Mosquera's forces. During the battle Castro captured some short-wave radio equipment and the army's code manual, thus improving his combat intelligence to the point that "Batista's forces could not go a yard without a perspiring runner arriving a few minutes later to tell Castro of it." (17:997) Batista's High Command became "a demoralized gaggle of corrupt, cruel and lazy officers without combat experience, [who] began to fear total extinction from an enemy of whose numbers and whereabouts they knew nothing accurate." (17:997)

On July 11, 1958, Castro surrounded Major Jose Quevedo at El Jigue. (2:110) When he learned that Major Quevedo was a former classmate from the university, Fidel requested a cease fire and sent a letter seeking a truce. The two men met, embraced, and shared some food which had been dropped earlier from government planes. After talking with Castro, Major Quevedo told his men that their first obligation was to the fatherland and so they must join the rebel forces. All 146 soldiers surrendered and gave their weapons and ammunition to the Fidelistas. Major Quevedo was later instrumental in establishing rebel contacts with other army officers. Frustrated, demoralized, and confused, Batista's army began to retreat to garrisons on the perimeter of Oriente and the Sierra Maestra on August 7, 1958. Opercion Verano had lasted 76 days.

The Fidelistas turned the retreat into a rout in which the army left the rebels over 600 weapons, including a 14-ton tank, 12 mortars, 2 bazookas, 12 machine guns on tripods, 21 rifle machine guns, 142 Garand rifles, and 200 Cristobal machine guns. (17:998) During the withdrawal, the Cuban Air Force, unable to distinguish between Batistianos and Fidelistas, napalmed both. Castro even used his captured army code to track troop movements and give misleading orders to the air force. Rebel losses during Opercion Verano were 27 killed and 50 wounded. (17:998) Meanwhile, the rebels took 433 prisoners, of which 422 were turned over to the Red Cross and 21 directly to the army. (17:998) An interesting point of contrast between the army and the Fidelistas on the treatment of prisoners

is recorded by Mr. Hugh Thomas on page 998 of his book entitled, Cuba, the Pursuit of Freedom:

The care with which these men were treated was exemplary even if that treatment served a political purpose, for it contrasted so strongly with treatment of prisoners captured by Batista that it inflicted another blow to Army prestige. The Army had, till this point, taken no prisoners at all.

In all, the army "lost more than a thousand men, including dead, wounded, prisoners and deserters" (6:126) during the offensive. Now, the Fidelistas decided to take the offensive.

#### Guerrilla Counter Offensive

Castro felt the countryside would soon be in rebel hands, thus forcing the army to retreat to the cities. Therefore, his strategy was to surround and isolate these urban areas by cutting off communications, then step up urban terror, culminating with a concerted attack by his Rebel Army. (2:111) However, he further believed that this strategy must involve other provinces besides Oriente, his present zone of operations, and so he developed a plan to expand his operations.

Castro's plan encompassed three geographic locations. Fidel and Raul, with their columns, stayed in the Sierra Maestra because by this time, fall 1958, Fidel's base camp at La Plata was formally organized. For example, Celia Sanchez, Castro's personal secretary, controlled his time and all access to the Commandante; a female group led by Olga Guevara served as a personal staff to Castro; Radio Rebelde was a fully operational radio station; and the Fidelistas even had an attending chaplain, Father Guillermo

Sardinas. (17:1011) From this base, Castro sent Che Guevara and a column of 148 men to Las Villas Province. Likewise, he sent Major Camilo Cienfuegos and another column of 82 men on a parallel course with Che's column to Pinar del Rio Province. Both Guevara and Cienfuegos marched for 45 days before reaching Las Villas Province. While the Fidelistas were positioning for their offensive, Batista was struggling one last time for political legitimacy.

Batista held a national election on November 3, 1958. The Fidelistas encouraged and, in some cases, "threatened" people not to vote. (17:1014) As a result, the electoral turnout was low, 30 per cent, and Batista's candidate, Rivero Aguero, "won." (17:1014) The election only succeeded in turning the remaining sector of Cuban society against Batista. Meanwhile, the Fidelistas stepped up activity in Oriente, Camaguey, and Las Villas Provinces; along with disorders, bombings, and terrorism in Havana and other cities.

In November 1958, after a systematic war on transportation and a succession of army barracks at Bayamo, Holquin, Manzanillo, and other towns, the Rebel Army ranks were swelling with recruits. Castro moved out of his base in the Sierra Maestra and started an offensive on the plains of Oriente with Santiago de Cuba as his ultimate destination.

On November 20, 1958, Castro met the Cuban Army at Guisa. For two weeks the battle raged, characterized by fierce, heavy armor, air force

bombing, night attacks, and counter attacks. Two hundred Fidelistas faced 5000 army soldiers. On December 6, 1958, the army retreated, leaving a tank, 94 rifles, 3 mortars, 1 bazooka, 14 trucks, and 200 dead. (2:116) Castro's forces were now formidable.

Meanwhile, in Las Villas Province, Guevara and Cienfuegos were threatening to cut the entire island in two. Although Batista sent 2000 reinforcements with tanks and heavy equipment to the province, isolated barracks continued to fall, and garrisons such as Fomento surrendered and joined Che's forces. (2:116) When the city of Cabaiguan fell, the rebels controlled Cuba's major highway. Behind rebel victories at Yaguajay, Placetas, Remedios, Caibarien, and Sancti Spiritus, the army was forced to retreat to Santa Clara, capital of Las Villas Province.

Che Guevara's ultimate victory at Santa Clara was classical traditional army, as well as guerrilla, tactics; i.e., isolate, divide, and conquer. (16:286) With 300 Fidelistas, he first captured all surrounding localities, thereby isolating the city, and then took the city itself in a piecemeal fashion. In a desperate attempt to save the city, Batista sent a troop train with tanks and 350 soldiers. (17:1024) Che met the train when it arrived, tore up the tracks around it, blew it up with dynamite, and then set it on fire. The 350 soldiers surrendered. By December 31, 1958, the battle was over and the rebels controlled the city. Meanwhile, Castro was having equal success driving toward Santiago.

### The Final Days

Batista, despite having over 40,000 soldiers, was almost powerless. The United States, through an emissary, told him to capitulate. Fearing a military conspiracy, Castro met with General Eulogio Cantillo, commander of all military forces in Oriente and chief of the Cuban Joint General Staff. They met on December 28, 1958, at the Oriente Sugar Mill in Palma Soriano and agreed on a military revolt which would commence on December 31, 1958. (2:118) However, General Cantillo met with Batista on December 29, 1958, and agreed to form a military junta after Batista left. General Cantillo then sent a message to Castro requesting a delay on the revolt until January 6, 1959. Castro was not fooled; he recognized Cantillo's deception and immediately collaborated a new agreement with Colonel Rego Rubido, Army Chief of Santiago de Cuba.

On January 1, 1959, Fulgencio Batista abdicated power and left Cuba for the Dominican Republic. General Cantillo attempted to set up a civilian-military junta, presided over by Dr. Carlos M. Piedra--oldest Magistrate of the Supreme Court. Castro denounced the junta over Radio Rebelde, pledged that his Rebel Army would keep fighting, and called for the army to surrender; in his own words, "revolution, yes; military coup, no!" (2:119) While calling for a general strike, Castro ordered Camilo and Che to advance with their columns on Havana. At the same time, Major Hubert Matos, another of Castro's column commanders, took Santiago de Cuba without firing a shot. Meanwhile, the strike brought the nation to a standstill and the junta disintegrated. Castro appointed Manuel Urrutia Provisional President, made



Col. Rubido Commander of the Armed Forces, and moved the capital from Havana to Santiago de Cuba. (2:119) The war was over. The power struggle would continue, but that's another story. Fighting in the Cuban Revolution officially ended on January 1, 1959.

## Chapter Three

### MILITARY STRATEGY

[Strategy] means the combination of individual engagements to attain the goal of the campaign.

Karl von Clausewitz

#### THE ACSC STRATEGY PROCESS MODEL

A process model is currently being used by ACSC to teach strategy. The model relies on the classic definition of strategy as "a plan of action that organizes efforts to achieve objectives" (19:7) or in other, more simpler terms, linking ends and means. Ultimately, "strategy is the process that connects the ends [objectives] with the means of achieving the ends." (19:7) The ACSC model helps to visualize this linkage.

The strategy process, as demonstrated by the ACSC model at Figure 2, consists of four steps. (19:7) The first step is determination of national objectives. These objectives should be clear and truly national; that is, backed by a majority of the population. The second step in the process model is formation of grand strategy. Here, the focus is on development and use of the instruments of national power: economic, political, and military. The third step is determination of military strategy. This step deals specifically with military forces as an instrument of national policy. Lastly, the fourth step is determination of battlefield strategy or, as it is more commonly called, tactics; emphasis is on how specific combat forces

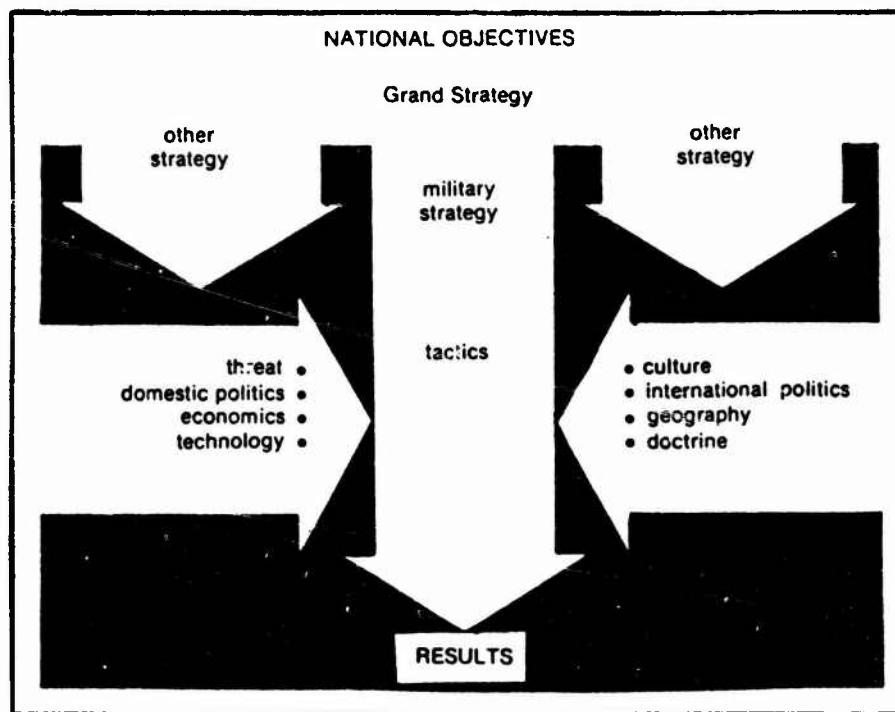


Figure 2. ACSC Strategy Process Model (18:13)

are used on the battlefield. Collectively, these four steps form the ACSC strategy process model.

### Military Strategy

Military strategy, as defined in the context of the ACSC strategy process model, is "the art and science of coordinating the development, deployment, and employment of military forces to achieve national security objectives." (19:10) Implicit in this definition is the need for clear, attainable objectives and the need for training, equipping, and properly employing the available military forces. The model emphasizes linkage between military strategy, available forces, and the battlefield environment. One last fact which is significant to our discussion of guerrilla warfare and the Cuban Revolution, is that "an appropriate military strategy is not necessarily synonymous with battlefield victory." (18:11)

### MILITARY STRATEGY IN THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

This discussion centers around the Cuban Revolution as a whole without getting battle-specific. That is covered in the next chapter. Using a broad prospective, the Cuban Revolution consisted of two distinct phases which overlap in certain aspects. (3:14) While operating under the grand strategy of overthrowing Dictator Fulgencio Batista, these two phases were, first, the pre and post landing phase and second, the Sierra Maestra phase.

In the pre and post landing phase, Castro's military strategy was to invade Cuba in conjunction with a provincial strike in Santiago de Cuba. He

had hoped the invasion and strike would spur a general mass uprising within the people, similar to what he had tried to do in 1953 at Moncada. (4:23) He developed his forces to support this strategy. The 82 guerrilla fighters he trained under Col. Bayo were to be the nucleus of his Rebel Army, the military arm of his revolutionary reform. When Castro deployed his forces on the Granma this was his military strategy. However, all this changed when he landed in the wrong place--two days after the unsuccessful strike in Santiago. As a result, he never had a chance to employ his forces and instead was forced into the second phase, the Sierra Maestra phase.

Emphasis in the Sierra Maestra phase shifted from dependence on a mass uprising to escalating guerrilla warfare. After his dismal landing and devastating ambush at Alegria de Pio, Castro was forced to shift his military strategy back to the development stage again. Emphasis initially was strictly on survival and cultivating local support for his Fidelistas. Primarily, this support consisted of gaining acceptance by the local peasants so they wouldn't report the Fidelistas to Batista's army. Only after cultivating this support and regrouping in the sanctity of the mountains were the Fidelistas able to achieve a few limited victories which further enhanced their support and morale.

Throughout the entire revolution, and especially during the early months of the Sierra Maestra phase, the Fidelistas faced overwhelming odds from the army. Castro sought safety in the mountains and held his deployments to a minimum, choosing to expand his operations only when the

army withdrew or, in the very latter stages of the revolution, began to crumble structurally as a fighting force.

Castro's employment was characterized throughout the revolution as one of flexibility keyed to the combat environment. "Castro's guerrilla tactics...aimed not so much at 'defeating' the enemy as at inducing him to lose his head, fight terror with counterterror on the largest possible scale, and make life intolerable for the ordinary citizen." (3:15) An important difference however, which Batista never realized, was that Castro directed his terror on the army, whereas Batista directed his on the citizens. Another key to Castro's success was his organization.

Castro used squads, platoons, and columns under a commander-in-chief called a comandante. (16:103-4) His basic unit was the squad, composed of 8-12 men and headed by a lieutenant. Four squads made up a platoon and four platoons a column. Each platoon had 35-40 men and was headed by a captain. A column had 100-150 men and was headed by a major. A schematic of his organization is included at Figure 3. However, unlike a traditional standing army, Castro's organization was not static; it depended solely on the stage of the campaign.

During the Cuban Revolution, Castro used a three-stage guerrilla campaign: nomadic, seminomadic, and frontal attack. (13:74-75) In the nomadic stage, his guerrilla fighters were little more than a partially armed band. Castro operated from deep within the Sierra Maestra Mountains

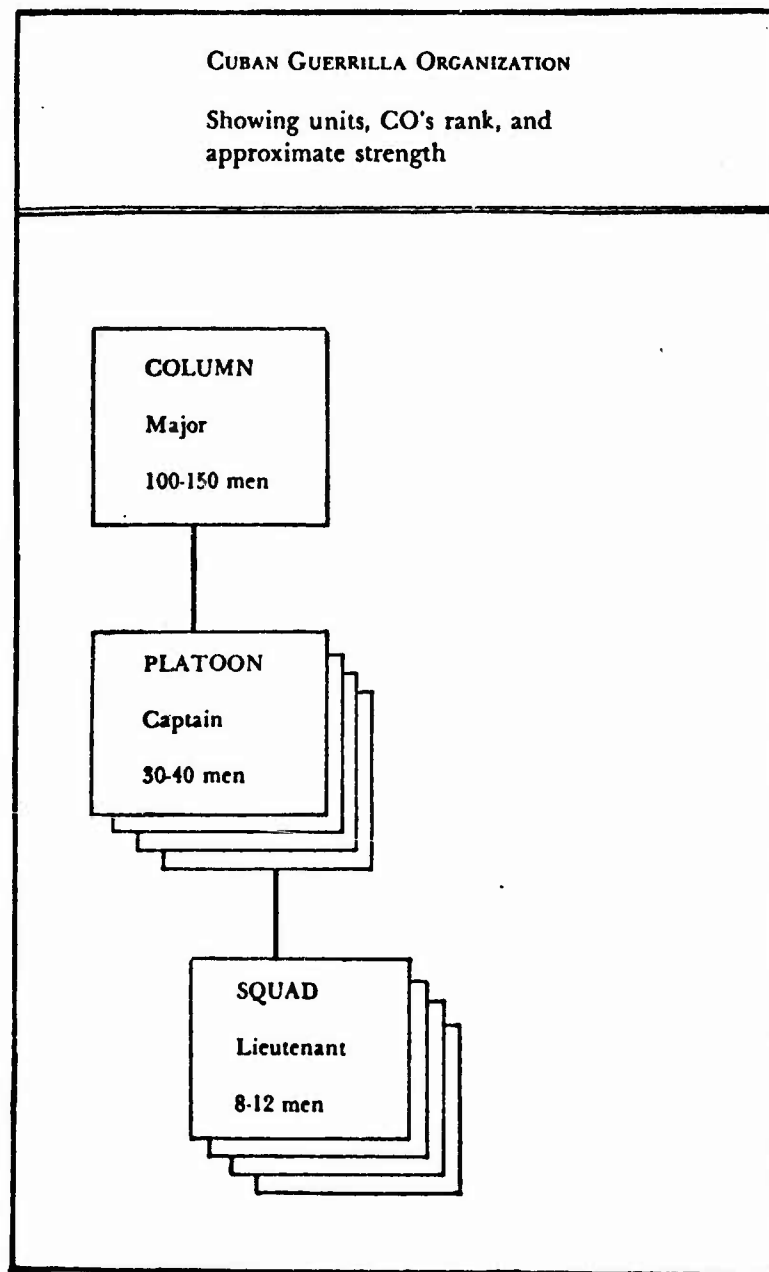


Figure 3. Cuban Guerrilla Organization (13:39)

and worked with local peasants in a "big brother" atmosphere. (7:31) He insisted his troops behave humanely toward wounded enemy soldiers, prisoners, civilians, and peasants. (18:22) Attacks were limited to isolated army outposts and patrols. Castro's victory at El Uvero marked the beginning of his seminomadic stage. (18:23) Recruitment increased dramatically, almost doubling his forces, and as Che noted "...a truly liberated zone existed [where] precautionary measures were not necessary." (8:33) The Fidelistas settled into semipermanent camps and established small industries, hospitals, courts, and a radio station. They were in an armed truce with Batista's forces, "something approaching a regular army bivouacking in friendly territory." (15:25) By August 1957, Castro was able to shift to more traditional arm operations. Strengthened by the Army battlefield failure in Operacion Verano, he launched successful frontal attacks against army columns and garrisons.

In summary, Castro did use military strategy in the context of the ACSC strategy process model in both phases of the Cuban Revolution. He developed, deployed, and employed his forces in a coordinated manner. He adjusted his troop strength and tactics to fit the combat environment.



## Chapter Four

### PRINCIPLES OF WAR

There exists a small number of fundamental principles of war, which may not be deviated from without danger, and the application of which, on the contrary, has been in all times crowned with glory.

Baron Antoine Henri Jomini

#### AFM 1-1

Warfare is a complex endeavor; however, there are "generally accepted major truths which have been proved successful in the art and science of conducting war." (19:2-4) AFM 1-1, Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force, identifies eleven warfighting principles "that have been demonstrated to be successful in past military operations, and if disregarded, would presage a high degree of risk and possible failure in future military actions." (19:2-5) Nevertheless, these basic principles of war are not static rules, they vary significantly with the situation and the level of combat. There is even some question about their importance.

Opinion varies on just how important the principles of war are to military success. While some tacticians think they are obsolete and should be abandoned, others view them as inviolate rules of engagement. Both schools, however, do agree that the principles of war are not a roadmap or checklist for guaranteed success. All eleven principles must be taken together and combined with initiative and improvisation. Collectively, the

air force believes that these principles are important and as a result current "aerospace doctrine flows from these principles." (19:2-5) But what about unconventional conflicts? This chapter takes each principle of war and examines it in the guerrilla warfare environment of the Cuban Revolution.

### PRINCIPLES OF WAR IN THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

#### Objective

AFM 1-1 calls this the most basic principle of war which "defines what the military action intends to accomplish and normally describes the nature and scope of an operation." (19:2-5) An objective must be clear, concise, and realistic; it can run the gamut from an overall war objective to a specific battle objective. In this realm, war and politics are related and intertwined. Furthermore, since war is a means of achieving political objectives, "political imperatives" shape military action. (19:2-5) Ultimately, the principle of objective can be taken in the macro (overall war) or micro (specific battle) mode. The Cuban Revolution was no exception.

In the macro, Castro's objective was to rid Cuba of Fulgencio Batista and his regime. When his political attempts failed to achieve this objective, vis-a-vis his 1952 court appeals, as did his call for an internal uprising in the 1953 Moncada attack, he resorted to guerrilla warfare.

Basically, Castro had four objectives which parallel and support his battle development of the Revolution. First, he sought to keep his forces

alive because, as demonstrated by his power struggles with the llano, Castro believed his guerrillas were the vanguard of reform. Secondly, he sought to strengthen his support base in the local Oriente populace. Thirdly, he sought to harass the army on a strictly controlled, escalating level. This supported his second objective and ultimately frustrated and undermined the army. Lastly, through the llano, he sought to cultivate dissatisfaction in the cities with Batista's regime by using general labor strikes. This caused Batista to overreact with his police force in the same manner as his army in Oriente.

Both Castro and Guevara thought it might take up to 20 years to oust Batista. (8:20) The fact that it didn't actually surprised Castro, which explains why he was in Santiago instead of Havana when Batista abdicated. However, in a brilliant political move, Castro shifted the Cuban capital to Santiago to protect his power center and made Col. Rubido Commander of the Armed Forces.

In the micro view, every battle objective was different. Overall they were classical guerrilla warfare: hit and run, counter-terror, gradual escalation, and political maneuvering. Che Guevara used his Cuban Revolution experiences to write a textbook on guerrilla warfare.

Castro's battlefield objectives grew in concert with his overall escalation of the war: nomadic, seminomadic, and frontal attack stages. At the Battle of La Plata in January 1957, the Fidelistas attacked a small army barracks. This was a small operation, well planned, and quickly executed.

The objective was to capture weapons and ammunition, but mostly to achieve a victory for morale. Castro's nomadic stage was characterized by limited engagements such as this against small garrisons and isolated outposts. In the seminomadic stage Castro stepped up his battle activity. Operating from an area of relative safety in the Sierra Maestra Mountains, he attacked moving troop columns (Battle of El Hombrito) and truck columns (First Battle of Pino del Agua). During this stage his objectives were recruitment and limited defense of territory. In his frontal attack stage, after Operacion Verano, Castro significantly increased his battle activity with operations approaching those of a traditional army. An excellent example was Che Guevara's decisive victory at the Battle of Santa Clara discussed earlier in Chapter Two.

### Offensive

AFM 1-1 states that the purpose of the offensive is "to act rather than react." (19:2-6) This principle of war is necessary for victory because a commander can seize the initiative and choose the time, place, and weaponry. AFM 1-1 recommends that a commander "seize the offensive at the very outset of hostilities." (19:2-6) The Cuban Revolution presents an interesting dichotomy to this principle.

Again, Castro's actions can be viewed on two levels, macro (war) and micro (specific battles). In the macro, he was on the offensive right from the Granma landing. After his defeat at Alegria de Pio and subsequent regrouping in the Sierra Maestra, he controlled when, where, and how his Fidelistas would fight the army. Although his level of battle activity was

inconsistent with offensive in the traditional war scenario, it was perfect for guerrilla warfare.

From a micro view, the Battle of El Uvero, in May 1957, marked the beginning of an offensive drive along traditional war lines. Unable to protect its garrisons and outposts, the army withdrew from the Sierra Maestra Mountains. The Fidelistas now had territory to protect. In March 1958, Castro established a triangle of guerrilla operations in Oriente consisting of a column in the Sierra Maestra, another in the municipalities northeast of the Sierra Maestra, and a third in El Cobre, west of Santiago. However, it was not until the army's failure and retreat after Operacion Verano, in August 1958, that Castro launched a concerted offensive. He sought to surround the army in the cities and spread his battle activities to other provinces. With this in mind, he sent Che's column to Las Villas Province with the ultimate goal of cutting the island in half and controlling the central highway that runs through Santa Clara. Likewise, he sent Major Cienfuegos' column to Pinar del Rio Province in western Cuba.

### Surprise

Surprise is an attack on an enemy "at a time, place, and manner for which he is neither prepared nor expecting an attack." (19:2-6) It is "achieved through security, deception, audacity, originality, and timely execution." (19:2-6) These two statements accurately describe Castro's battle plan throughout the entire Cuban Revolution. Surprise is the cornerstone of guerrilla warfare. Castro used the element of surprise to

initially terrorize army garrisons and outposts which ultimately forced the army to retreat from the Sierra Maestra. Most of his victories, such as La Plata, Arroyo del Infierno, and El Uvero, were a complete surprise to the army and were characterized by a hail of bullets from a Rebel Army of unknown size.

### Security

According to AFM 1-1, security "involves active and passive defensive measures and the denial of useful information to an enemy" and is "achieved through a combination of factors such as secrecy, disguise, operational security, deception, dispersal, maneuver, timing, posturing, and the defense and hardening of forces." (19:2-7) It is enhanced by proper command, control, communication, and intelligence. To a vastly inferior guerrilla force, this principle equates to survival.

Castro ultimately insured his security by basing his forces in the rugged Sierra Maestra Mountains. He kept his force structure small, never more than 300 fighters and never more than 80-150 men in one place. He collected intelligence from local peasants, army defectors, prisoners, and by using captured army radios and code books. More importantly, he kept his plans secret and never revealed much to his basic guerrilla fighters. For example, 48 hours prior to his attack on the army post at El Uvero, only Che Guevara and several other key staff members knew what the target was. Everyone else knew only to remain fully dressed and ready to move within 48 hours. Castro was also very harsh on traitors and spies, both guerrillas and peasants. As Che noted, "Denouncing us did violence to their own

conscience and, in any case, put them in danger, since revolutionary justice was speedy." (18:20-21)

Ultimately, the Sierra Maestra Mountains played the dominant role in Castro's security throughout the Cuban Revolution. They provided sanctuary, a territorial free zone, and finally, a staging area for operations into Bayamo, Santiago, and Santa Clara.

#### Mass and Economy of Force

Mass and economy of force is a balanced concept which is driven by the objective. Properly executed, it will "break the enemy's defenses, disrupt his plan of attack, destroy the cohesion of his forces, produce the psychological shock that may thwart a critical enemy thrust, or create an opportunity for friendly forces to seize the offensive." (19:2-7) The commander must determine his priorities with an eye on the combat environment. Castro's application of this principle was classical guerrilla warfare but he achieved the results stated above.

Surprise, coupled with maneuverability, can enhance mass and economy of force beyond mere numerical strength. An example was the Battle of El Hombrito in August 1957. Castro attacked a column of army troops moving along a road leading to El Hombrito. He set up an ambush along a deep ravine and attacked from both sides. Although he had only two heavy caliber weapons, a Maxim machine gun and a rifle, he used shotguns to enhance the overall confusion. After the initial attack, the guerrillas fell back and set up a second ambush. Thus, the Fidelistas successfully attacked an army

column of approximately 140 men armed with bazookas and mortars. The guerrillas suffered one casualty, the army lost six men. More importantly, the guerrillas learned how to attack army columns on the march using surprise and maneuverability to enhance mass and economy of force.

### Maneuver

AFM 1-1 defines maneuver as the "movement of friendly forces in relation to enemy forces." (19:2-7) In essence, it is strength against weakness and its effective use can "maintain the initiative, dictate the terms of engagement, retain security, and position forces at the right time and place to execute surprise attacks." (19:2-7) If surprise is the cornerstone of guerrilla warfare, maneuver is certainly the foundation. Castro lived by this principle throughout the Cuban Revolution because his forces were inferior both numerically and in terms of firepower.

In his book on guerrilla warfare, Che Guevara points out that mobility (maneuver) is the fundamental characteristic of a guerrilla band. He bases his description of a "typical" guerrilla fighter mainly on this requirement. According to Che, a guerrilla fighter should be a peasant rather than a city dweller because the peasant is more resistant, and should not be older than 45 years-old, nor younger than 16 (ideally 25-35).

Guerrilla operations are founded on maneuver. Tactics such as hit and run, encirclement, counter-encirclement, luring, the minuet, night attacks, and speedy retreats demand it. The minuet, named for its analogy with the dance, is an interesting example. In Che's own words:



The guerrilla bands encircle an enemy position, an advancing column for example; they encircle it completely from the four points of the compass, with five or six men in each place, far enough away to avoid being encircled themselves; the fight is started at any one of the points and the army moves toward it; the guerrilla band then retreats, always maintaining visual contact, and initiates its attack from another point. The army will repeat its action and the guerrilla band the same. Thus, successively, it is possible to keep an enemy column immobilized, forcing it to expend large quantities of ammunition and weakening the morale of its troops without incurring great dangers. (7:24)

Castro used maneuver and variations of the minuet throughout the revolution at battles such as La Plata, Arroyo del Infierno, Pino del Agua, and El Uvero. Each one depended on mobility for positioning, conduct of the battle, and retreat. His ability to return to the safety of the Sierra Maestra was always paramount.

#### Timing and Tempo

AFM 1-1 defines timing and tempo as "executing military operations at a point in time and at a rate which optimizes the use of friendly forces and which inhibits or denies the effectiveness of enemy forces." (19:2-8) The express purpose is "to dominate the action, remain unpredictable, and create uncertainty in the mind of the enemy." (19:2-8) It is a mix of surprise, security, mass, and maneuver which is highly dependent on intelligence data.

Castro controlled the timing and tempo through his gradually escalating guerrilla tactics. Again this is reflected in his three stages of development: nomadic, seminomadic, and frontal attacks. Early in the campaign he attacked small garrisons and isolated outposts, moving up progressively to troop and truck columns. With the exception of Operacion

Verano, Castro dictated when, where, and how to fight. He dominated the tempo, always unpredictably. He forced the army to withdraw from the Sierra Maestra, and ultimately turned the army offensive into a humiliating retreat.

Intelligence played an important role in Castro's success controlling the tempo. Since he had grown up in Oriente, Castro knew the land and the people. His initial support came from a few loyal peasants, such as Ramon Perez. He cultivated this grass roots support by developing a "Robin Hood" relationship with the peasants. However, as pointed out earlier, he also severely punished government sympathizers and collaborators.

During the seminomadic and frontal stages, Castro used army prisoners, deserters, and an elaborate system of guerrilla outposts to enhance his intelligence. He also used captured army radios and code books to intercept and confuse government initiatives. Castro also used a postal organization of couriers who carried his letters and messages to dispersed columns, local officials, llano members, and surrounded army units.

#### Unity of Command

Unity of command is "vesting appropriate authority and responsibility in a single commander to effect unity of effort in carrying out an assigned task." (19:2-8) This principle rests on the concept of a centralized authority who makes decisions and coordinates action. This individual insures that activities by subordinate commanders support the battle objectives.

In the Cuban Revolution, Castro was always in charge, politically and militarily. His strong beliefs about how the revolutionary reform should be conducted led him to break with the Ortodoxo Party in 1956 and form the 26th of July Movement. Later, in March 1958, he maneuvered to keep the llano faction subordinate to his Sierra Maestra base.

Militarily, Castro planned all the strategy for guerrilla action. Initially, he led the attacks himself. In the latter stages of the revolution when he had columns deployed out of the Sierra Maestra under Che Guevara, Raul Castro, and Camilo Cienfuegos, he still maintained centralized control at his La Plata base camp. He did, however, give his operational commanders the power and authority to carry out their assigned missions. For example, when Che Guevara deployed to Las Villas Province, his military task was to cut the island in half by controlling the roads, especially the central highway at Santa Clara. Politically, Guevara also had permission to establish contacts with all political groups in the area and even to set up a military government over the area.

### Simplicity

The principle of simplicity relates directly to guidance. Guidance should be quick, clear, concise and promote ease of execution. (19:2-8) Castro practiced this principle verbally and operationally.

Throughout most of the Cuban Revolution Castro was directly in command of all combat operations. He personally planned and led the attacks at La

Plata, El Arroyo del Infierno, and El Uvero. In mid 1958, he established a triangle of operational activity in Oriente Province by deploying two columns away from his mountain base.

As mentioned earlier, Castro's force structure was always small, never more than 300 personnel. This made guidance relatively easy. When not in direct command of a column, he used couriers and later electronic means to issue orders and collect operational reports.

### Logistics

AFM 1-1 defines logistics as "sustaining both men and machine in combat by obtaining, moving, and maintaining warfighting potential." (19:2-9) It further states that a logistics system should be simple, secure, and flexible. Castro's logistics chain was simplicity personified.

In his book on guerrilla warfare, Che Guevara discusses supplies. He says they should come from the local populace, should be paid for if possible, stolen if necessary, but if stolen, a bond or promissory note should be given and honored. Once a free zone is established, the guerrillas should plant crops, progressing gradually to small industry and even taxation. Guevara's work is essentially a historical record of his Cuban Revolution experiences but this author could not find any other historical proof that the Fidelistas followed this pattern. Instead, it appears most of their support came from the cities. Initially, they did get supplies from loyal supporters in the local area, such as Ramon Perez and his brother Crescencio, but farming support is a mystery. Still, the

peasants did support Castro in another way. After the Battle of La Plata in January 1957:

The guajiros (peasants) contributed generously of what there was to spare of food in a hungry country, and became, as Fidel had predicted, the supply line as well as the eyes and ears of the revolutionary army. Soon strong and willing couriers and supply carriers began to pass through the Army lines to Bayamo, Manzanillo, and Santiago, and to return, along precipitous mountain footpaths where no mule could travel, laden with heavy burlap sacks of canned goods, dried codfish, rice and beans, blankets, hammocks, new uniforms, boots, and squares of plastic table covering or shower curtains that served as shelter from the rain during the wet nights in the Sierra. (16:91)

Ammunition and weapons were always collected after battles; they were vitally important. For example, after the attack on Castro's guerrillas at Alegria de Pio, Guevara was faced with fleeing with his medical bag or a cartridge box. He chose the cartridge box.

#### Cohesion

AFM 1-1 defines cohesion as "establishing and maintaining warfighting spirit and the capacity of a force to win" or as the "cement that holds a unit together." (19:2-9) This principle of war is directly dependent on a leader's spirit and is enhanced by his leadership, a common identity, and a sense of shared purpose. In the Cuban Revolution, Castro was the cohesion.

By any definition, Castro was a leader who melded his fighters together. In stature and physical bearing he looked like a leader, "a powerful six-footer, olive-skinned, full-faced, with a scraggly beard." (16:96) He was an excellent orator who mesmerized his troops and the local

peasants. A strict disciplinarian, he set tough standards and enforced them. He didn't hesitate to try and execute traitors and spies, and at one point in the campaign even reduced his forces rather than compromise discipline. Lastly, he was an accomplished military and political tactician who was driven by the determination to win.

## Chapter Five

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If Batista had been stronger, wiser, and honest; if the Army and policy had not been divided and corrupt and had not acted so brutally; if the middle-class civil resistance had sensed that Castro, as they saw it, would "betray" his promises; if the United States had not imposed an arms embargo; and so many other "ifs," a victory for the guerrillas would have been impossible. Men and things in Cuba were what they were; that is why there was a Castro Revolution. Nothing is more futile than quarreling with history. (12:86)

#### Conclusions

This research project has reviewed the Cuban Revolution (1956-59) and the principle guerrilla combatants, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. Guevara progressed from troop physician to an important field commander. He played a subordinate role to Castro but, nevertheless, was brave, a sound tactician in his own right, and recorded battle events and techniques for history. Fidel Castro was the unquestioned military and political leader of the revolution.

Examination revealed that Guevara and Castro did use military strategy as defined by the ACSC strategy process model. They developed, deployed, and employed their forces in a guerrilla warfare scenario with the ultimate goal of ousting Fulgencio Batista. Guevara and Castro used military strategy in two distinct phases.

In the pre and post landing phase, the Fidelistas trained in Mexico under Col. Bayo. They deployed to Cuba in November 1956 on the Granma but never employed because of a landing mix-up and subsequent army ambush. During the Sierra Maestra phase, the Fidelistas redeveloped in the sanctity of the Sierra Maestra Mountains. They deployed gradually, attacking increasingly more difficult targets. Castro deployed his forces in three stages: nomadic, characterized by survival; seminomadic, characterized by semipermanent camps in a zone of free operations; and frontal attack, initiated after the army retreat following Operacion Verano. Overall, Guevara and Castro used a military strategy of escalating guerrilla warfare to win.

Guevara and Castro also used the basic principles of war as stated in AFM 1-1. Despite the guerrilla warfare environment, they used these principles throughout the Cuban Revolution. Their overall objective was to oust Batista. Using "hit and run" tactics coupled with surprise, mobility, and operational simplicity, Guevara and Castro controlled the tempo and dictated when, where, and how the conflict would be conducted. All this was done under the strong leadership of Castro with support from a solid populace base in Oriente Province and the cities.

Military leaders today can learn two important lessons from this analysis. First, the basics, military strategy and the principles of war, are applicable in the guerrilla warfare environment. Second, and perhaps fundamentally more important, know your enemy and tailor your objectives to



the battle environment. In short, don't get caught up in the battles and forget the objective. Batista never saw the guerrillas as a "military" threat to his regime. He calculated, as the US did in Vietnam on a vastly greater scale, that an overwhelming superiority in arms was enough to ensure victory. (12:105) In terms of the battlefield, Batista never developed an appropriate military strategy or applied the principles of war. Guevara and Castro did!

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In the final analysis, Castro and Guevara's success in the Cuban Revolution cannot be based merely on their use of military strategy and the principles of war. During my research I found several collateral areas whose exploration and analysis would further clarify their victory and explain Batista's defeat. As a result, I recommend the following areas for further investigation:

1. Was the Cuban Army a fighting force capable of executing military initiatives? How bad was corruption? What effect did mutiny and collaboration with the Fidelistas have on the final outcome?
2. How significant was the role of political factions such as Directorio Revolucionario, the Ortodox Party, Resistencia Civica, etc., in the Cuban Revolution? Did they directly or indirectly help Castro?
3. When and why did Guevara and Castro move into the Communist camp and align Cuba with Russia?
4. Where did Castro get the funds to train his guerrillas in Mexico? Where did he get supplies during the Revolution?

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